

PARENTS' RIGHT TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S AND SCHOOL'S ACHIEVEMENT

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The No Child Left Behind Act regards parents as consumers who play a vital role in the education of their children. As consumers, they are entitled to have information about their child's program and teachers. Parents should also know if their child is in a failing schools and what they can do about it. This new law contains many parent "right to know" provisions, and all communication with parents must be in an understandable format and, if practicable, in languages parents understand.

Right to Know Child's Achievement. At the beginning of every school year, the school district must notify each parent of a child attending a Title I school the achievement level of the child on the state's tests. This information must be an individual, descriptive and diagnostic report that allows parents (as well as teachers and the principal) to understand and address the specific needs of the student. This information must be understandable; that is, it can't be meaningless numbers or phrases. The information should describe --that is, diagnose and interpret--in words, using samples of student work if possible, what achievement levels and numbers mean.

Right to Know Personnel Qualifications. At the beginning of every school year, the school district must notify all parents of children attending Title I schools that they may request information about their child's teachers. That information must be provided "in a timely manner." At a minimum, parents must be told

- whether the teacher has met state qualifications for the grade and subject she/he teaches;
- whether the teacher is teaching under emergency or provisional credentials because the state has waived normal qualifications;
- the teacher's college major and any graduate certification or degree and the discipline in which it was taken; and
- whether paraprofessionals provide services to the child, and if so, their qualifications.

In addition, and without request, the Title I school must give parents "timely" notice when their child has been assigned to and has been taught by a teacher who has not met the state's highest qualifications for four or more consecutive weeks.

Right To Know For Parents of Limited-English Proficient Children. Parents of these children have an automatic right, without asking, for information about their child's placement, or possible placement, in a language instruction program. And they have the right "to opt out" of any placement and to chose another method or program of instruction.

Within 30 days of the beginning of the school year (or within two weeks of the child's program placement), each local school system that uses Title I funds for language instruction, must provide certain information to parents of limited-English proficient (LEP) children who are in a language instructional program or who have been identified for placement in such a program. The notice must give

- the reasons for identifying the child as LEP and in need of a language instruction program;
- the child's level of English proficiency, how it was determined, and the "status" of the child's achievement;
- the instructional methods of the program in which the child is participating or might be assigned to, and other available language programs that differ in content, use of English and a native language;
- how that program is meeting (or will meet) their child's educational strengths;
- how the program specifically will help the child learn English and meet standards for grade promotion and graduation; and
- the specific exit requirements for the program and the expectation for transition into an all-English classroom. (Secondary schools using Title I funds for language instruction must also provide the expected rate of high school graduation.)

If a LEP child is also disabled, the parental notification must include information on how the language instructional program meets the objectives of the child's individual education plan.

The notification must include written guidance explaining

- the parent's right to request that the child immediately be removed ("opt out") of a language instructional program;
- the other possible programs or methods of instruction available;
- how parents will receive assistance in selecting another program, if offered by the school district.

In addition to these requirements, parents must be told if the child's language instructional program (or the one proposed for enrollment) supported by Title I funds, is not meeting its annual goals for English proficiency.

Notification for Parents of Children Attending Schools Not Making Progress. The No Child Left Behind Act sets up a whole scheme for identifying Title I schools that are not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) based primarily on the results of student testing in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8. This identification occurs every year but is based on two or three years' scores. Schools can be placed in one of three categories—schools in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. Parents have a right to know whether or not their child's school is making adequate yearly progress in student achievement, and if it is not, what they can do about it.

Once a school has been identified for one of the three categories, local educational officials must “promptly” provide notice to all parents of enrolled students. This notice must explain:

- what the identification means and the reasons for it in understandable words;
- what the school is doing to address problems of low student achievement;
- what local and state authorities are doing to correct the problems;
- how parents can become involved in addressing the academic problems that caused the school to be identified in the first place.

Parents must also be told about the options to transfer their child to another public school or to obtain supplementary educational services, if their school has continued to fail the adequate yearly progress requirement for two or more years.

Notice about the right to public school choice must be given to parents “not later than the first day of the school year following identification.” Priority for the right to transfer goes to the lowest-achieving students from low-income families. At a minimum, the notice must include information on the academic achievement of the schools to which the child may transfer. Free transportation is provided as long as the child’s original school remains in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status.

Supplementary Educational Services are opportunities for after-school or Saturday tutoring or other services that will enable children to achieve proficiency on tests aligned with state standards. The notice to parents must provide, “at a minimum,”

- the availability of services;
- the identity of service providers that are within the school district and are reasonably available in the neighboring school district;
- a brief description of the services, the qualifications and effectiveness of the providers;
- the opportunity to request assistance in choosing a provider;
- the fair and equitable procedures for serving students if providers can not serve all students.